

Q. How does fluoride work?

A. When the element fluoride is used in small amounts on a routine basis it helps to prevent tooth decay. It encourages "remineralization" or strengthening of the tooth enamel. Fluoride occurs naturally in water, and is an ingredient in many dental products such as tooth paste, mouth rinses, gels, varnish and supplements. Fluoride is effective when combined with a healthy diet and good oral hygiene.

Q. Will my child need fluoride supplements?

A. Children between the ages of 6 months and 16 years may require fluoride supplements. Dr. Fern considers many different factors before recommending a fluoride supplement, including a child's age and the amount of naturally occurring fluoride in your water supply. Bottled, filtered, spring, and well waters vary in their fluoride amount, so a water analysis is necessary to ensure your child is receiving the proper amount.

Q. How much fluoride does my child need?

A. Unlike most medicines, fluoride dosage corresponds to a child's age, not their weight. It also depends on the amount of fluoride present in your drinking water. We recommend testing water for fluoride level every 3 years in order to prescribe the most appropriate dosage.

Q. What type of tooth paste should my child use?

A. I do not recommend any tooth paste for infants and toddlers. Instead, I advise using one of several brands of tooth cleansers that do not have any fluoride. Once your child is old enough to spit out fully in the bathroom sink I recommend toothpaste that has fluoride and the American Dental Association Seal of Acceptance. Young children, especially pre-schoolers, need careful parental supervision with only a dab on the brush. School-age children also need close parental supervision and only a small pea-sized amount of tooth paste on the brush so they don't swallow the good-tasting toothpaste.

Q. How safe is fluoride?

A. Fluoride is documented to be safe and highly effective. Research indicates water fluoridation has decreased the decay rate by over 50%. Only small amounts of fluoride are necessary for the maximum benefit. Proper tooth paste amount must be supervised, and other forms of fluoride supplements must be carefully monitored. Do not leave tooth paste where children can reach unsupervised since the flavors that help encourage them to brush also tempt them to eat tooth paste.

Q. What is topical fluoride?

A. Topical fluoride comes in a number of different forms. There are gels and foams, and the newer form is a topical fluoride varnish. I apply the fluoride varnish after your child's teeth have been thoroughly cleaned. The varnish is applied with a small brush-like applicator, and the children readily accept it. The advantages of a fluoride treatment in our office are:

- Easily and quickly applied to the teeth. It only takes 1 minute.
- Fluoride continues to be absorbed into the enamel for approximately 24 hours after the application.

Q. Who benefits from a topical fluoride treatment?

A. All children and teenagers. This benefit exists whether they have no cavities, a few cavities, a lot of cavities, or braces. All children and teens should receive a fluoride treatment with their cleaning twice a year.